***‘creating the trade professional’***

**Candidate Assessment Guide**

**Part 2: Tasting**

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WSET® Level 4 Diploma

in Wines and Spirits

Wine & Spirit Education Trust 39-45 Bermondsey Street, London, SE1 3XF e-mail: wset@wset.co.uk

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## THE PURPOSE OF THE SAT

The Systematic Approach to Tasting (SAT) is a teaching aid and assessment tool that was devised by the WSET to be used in conjunction with our qualifications. The WSET’s main objective is to offer training to those in the wine and spirits trade and as such the SAT is designed to develop two fundamental skills: an ability to accurately describe a sample and then make reasonable conclusions based on these accurate descriptions.

Therefore, both the WSET Diploma Systematic

Approach to Tasting Wine® (SAT Wine) and the WSET

Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting Spirits® (SAT Spirits) provide a structured way of writing a complete and detailed description of wines and spirits.

The SATs are divided into two parts: a descriptive part and an evaluative part. The first, descriptive, part of the SAT should be used to write a purely objective description of a sample. It covers how the sample presents itself in appearance, to your nose, and on your palate (including the impressions that linger after spitting/swallowing). For the purposes of the Level 4 Diploma examinations, this presents the examiners with a chance to assess two important skills:

* How accurately you can assess the levels of various components of a sample, relative to appropriate scales;
* How well you can write a complete description of the aromas and flavours of a sample that communicates what the sample tastes like to someone who has not tasted it.

Diploma examiners recognise that different tasters have different levels of sensitivity to the components in wines and spirits such as sugar, acid, tannin and alcohol. However, the examiners also assume that through a combination of practice and coaching you will have calibrated your palate alongside those of other expert tasters, to be able to classify the levels of these and other components as ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’, relative to the general world of wines and spirits. Aroma and flavour vocabulary is more personal, and there is room for more freedom here, with the restriction that the terms used in the tasting note must make sense to the reader (examiner) as well as the writer.

The second, evaluative, part requires you to use evidence from the descriptive part to draw conclusions about the wine or spirits. This receives far more attention at Level 4 than at lower levels. For the purposes of the Diploma examinations, the examiners are able to assess two important skills:

* How well you present a well-argued quality assessment of a wine or spirit;

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* How well you can judge a wine’s potential for further ageing. (This does not apply to spirits.)

The examiners will also sometimes ask you to identify other facets of a wine or spirit. For example the origin of a wine and the grape variety/ies used to make it or the style of spirit and the raw material used in its production. Other questions may be asked too, for example price bands, or production factors.

## DETAILED POINTS ABOUT THE SATS The Overall Structure

As we have already seen, the SAT comes in two main parts. Within each part there are several lines and each one consists of a left hand column with general headings such as ‘Clarity/brightness’, ‘Intensity’, ‘Colour’, ‘Other observations’, and a right hand column with some specific terms to use. In some cases, you are restricted to using the specific terms, and in other cases the specific terms are optional. This will be explained in more detail below.

The SAT is supported by a second document, the Lexicon. This appears on the reverse side of the laminated SAT card. The Lexicon is a list of descriptive words covering some suggested aroma and flavour terms, and words for describing other observations.

The Lexicon is used for producing the marking key, and you will be able to gain full marks using just those terms. However, you are not limited to just using these words and where you wish to use other words, the examiner will reward you where appropriate. This means that the terms you use should be understood by the examiner, as well as being valid descriptions of the sample.

## Hyphenated Lines

Where terms in the right hand column of the SAT are separated by hyphens (for example, ‘lemon-green – lemon – gold – amber – brown’), you should select ONE of the terms to describe the wine. Be specific. For example, if you think the wine sits on the border of ruby and garnet, make a decision, rather than using a range such as ‘ruby-garnet’ or ‘ruby to garnet’. If both ruby and garnet are valid descriptions, then this will be noted in the marking key. If you use a range (‘ruby to garnet’, ‘low to medium(-)’), then the examiner will NOT grant you the mark even where the marking key allows a range. This is because you are not using the SAT correctly.

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Furthermore, if you use alternative words, such as ‘straw’ or ‘cherry’ for colour, or ‘crisp’ for acidity, you will NOT be awarded marks. Candidates and educators may know individually (or within their community) what they mean by these and other additional words, but for the exam to be valid, the use of words needs to be consistent between examiners and candidates.

The main reason for limiting you to such a short set of terms is that calibrating eyes, noses and palates to achieve consistent use of these words alone presents a considerable, but manageable challenge. Achieving consistent use with a wider vocabulary would be even harder, and is not necessary: the terms provided are sufficient to describe any sample accurately.

## ‘e.g.’ Lines

Where terms in the right hand column are preceded by ‘e.g.’, you are not restricted to the terms in the SAT. In the case of the lines ‘Aroma characteristics’, ‘Flavour characteristics’, and ‘Other observations’ under ‘Palate’, you are strongly encouraged to use the Lexicon.

## Using the Scales

Most instances where hyphens are used require you to place the level of a component on a scale ranging from low (or pale, light, dry, short) through medium to high (or deep, full, luscious, pronounced, long). Nearly all of these are three-point scales (such as ‘low – medium – high’) that are further subdivided. There are four main types of scale.

**Divided medium** – For most components in the SAT Wine, only the band that is covered by ‘medium’ in the three point scale is subdivided into three equal parts. This creates a five point scale and it is very important to remember that this is not a scale of five equal parts. Therefore, ‘medium(+)’, for example, can be thought of as ‘medium, but towards the upper end of the medium band’. ‘Medium’ is divided this way because the majority of observations for the majority of wines lie within ‘medium’, and subdividing this makes it possible for candidates to differentiate within this commonlyused area.

It can be tempting to over-use medium (including ‘medium(+)’ and ‘medium(-)’). But the danger is that tasting notes end up consisting almost entirely of mediums, and fail to capture the true character of individual wines.

Some candidates have found it useful to make their initial assessment of the wine using a basic three point scale. The restricted range of terms encourages them to be bolder in using the ends of the scale. Then, they can return to the components they have described as ‘medium’ and decide whether to further refine this assessment with a (+) or a (-).

Another way to help avoid over-using ‘medium’ is to think of ‘medium’ (including ‘medium(+)’ and ‘medium(-)’) as meaning the same as ‘unremarkable’. For many components of many wines, the level is indeed unremarkable, and in these cases it is appropriate to use medium (including (+) and (-)). However, many of the wines used in Diploma examinations will have at least some remarkably high or low levels of certain components. If you think the acid is a remarkable feature, but your awareness of wines with even higher acidity is making you hesitate to describe the acid as ‘high’ rather than ‘medium(+)’, then you should remember that ‘high’ is also a range. Its use should not be limited to wines that are at the very extremes. Be confident to use the ends of the scales.

**Sweetness** – For this line in the SAT Wine, each point on the three point scale is divided into two. ‘Dry’ is subdivided into ‘dry’ and ‘off-dry’, ‘medium’ into ‘medium-dry’ and ‘medium-sweet’ and ‘sweet’ is subdivided into ‘sweet’ and ‘luscious’. This reflects the fact that most wines are dry or off-dry and the huge differences in sugar levels between sweet wines.

The situation for the SAT Spirits is different. Nearly all spirits are dry and those that are not are the exception. There is no clear spread of sweetness levels for spirits as there is for wine. Therefore the revised three-point scale for sweetness in spirits is entirely unique and designed to cover the main points in the somewhat discontinuous range of sweetness levels that occur in spirits. This is discussed below in more detail.

**Divided low** – In the SAT Spirits there are a number of instances when the bottom end of the three-point scale is divided in order to accommodate certain characteristics that are common to many spirits. For ‘Intensity’ in the ‘Appearance’ section this allows for an accurate description of the intensity of colourless spirits. For ‘Intensity’ on the nose and palate the division is necessary to accurately describe spirits such as vodka that are very low in aroma and flavour. In this instance the term used is ‘neutral’.

**Descriptive progressions** – For certain lines, ‘Mousse’ in

SAT Wine; ‘Alcohol’ and ‘*nature*’ of the ‘Finish’ in SAT Spirits; and ‘Colour’ in both SATs, the scale is broadly progressive but also contains a descriptive element. These scales have been adopted in order to make life easier for you and the examiners. How each one should be used is described in detail below.

**Write Full Sentences, Not Bullet Points** Remember that the examiner wants to test your ability to communicate a complete description of a wine or spirit, and not just your ability to assess levels of structural components. Therefore it is more appropriate for you to answer in full sentences rather than bullet points. In this guide there are examples of model tasting notes, written in sentences. These demonstrate that turning bullet points or lists into full sentences does not require many more words (or much more time). You can use the same sentence structure for all of your notes, and doing so may even help you avoid missing structural components.

## DIPLOMA TASTING PAPERS

In all units with tasting elements included as part of the examination, samples are presented in flights of three.

Note that although typical question styles will be described here, and past questions offer a good indication of what will be asked in the future, the examiners may decide to change what they ask in the evaluative part of the examination without announcing what this will be. Therefore, be flexible!

## Unit 3

You will taste and evaluate twelve wines in total. These are divided into four flights of three, with a short break between the first six wines and the last six wines. You have one hour for each block of six wines. Your grade is based on your total score across the twelve wines. For Unit 3, the theory and tasting papers are treated separately: if you pass tasting and fail the theory (or vice versa), you only need to retake the part you have failed. Exceptional performance in theory combined with a fail for tasting (or vice versa) does not even out as an overall pass: both parts must be passed separately.

The wines used in the exam can come from anywhere within the Unit 3 syllabus, and are not limited to the Recommended Tasting Samples listed in the specification. There are three main types of question:

**Common link** – There will usually be two flights where you will be asked to identify the common link. The common link could be grape variety, or region of origin, or it could be a factor (in the vineyard or winery) that affects the style of the wine. The common link may be left unstated and in some cases the examiners may ask you to establish what the common link is, before you provide reasons to support your conclusion.

**Quality levels** – There will almost always be a flight where there are three wines in a similar style (same grape variety, same origin) but at different quality levels. This is a chance for you to show you can correctly identify and evaluate quality levels in considerable detail.

**Mixed bag** – Not all wines are suitable for ‘common link’ questions and a very limited number of wine styles are suitable for ‘quality levels’ questions. Therefore there will usually be at least one flight where all the samples

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are unrelated and each wine has to be taken on its own merits. This provides the examiners with a chance to pick wines from the whole of the syllabus.

Any of these formats may be all white, all red, all rosé, or a mix of white, red and rosé wines.

## Units 4, 5 and 6

You will taste and comment on just three samples in an exam that combines tasting with theory. Unlike Unit 3, your marks are based on your combined tasting and theory scores, so a good score in one part can make up for a marginal fail in the other, leading to an overall pass grade.

The most common format is the ‘mixed bag’, but it is also possible that the examiners might present you with a trio of samples with a (stated or unstated) common link, or three from the same origin but differing in style and/or quality.

As with Unit 3, Units 5 and 6 may be all white, all red, all rosé, or a mix of white, red and rosé wines. Unit 4 may include any combination of spirits.

## Faulty Wines

Faulty wine will not be shown in Diploma tasting examinations. The samples are always assessed as they are decanted into neutral bottles. Faulty samples are removed from the line-up. If, however so many bottles are faulty there is not enough liquid to go around the faulty sample will be removed from the tasting.

If this happens your APP will initially attempt to find a replacement wine that is as similar to the exam wine as possible. A tasting note and sample bottle will be returned to WSET which the examiners will use as they mark your answers.

If it is not possible to find a replacement, the length of the examination will be reduced by ten minutes per sample. This will be announced by the invigilator prior to the start of the examination.

If this happened your answers would be given particular attention by the Chief Examiner and your marks would be adjusted accordingly in order to take into account the missing wine(s). It is not possible to detail how exactly these scripts would be marked as each situation will be unique. Nevertheless, the examiners acknowledge that this would be a stressful situation and would be sympathetic in their response in order to ensure a fair outcome for all.

Please note, faults are relatively rare and in most cases there is enough liquid even if one bottle is faulty. The instances where it would be necessary to withdraw a sample from an examination are, thankfully, extremely rare.

## CLARITY/BRIGHTNESS

A perfectly clear wine does not scatter a beam of light passing through the body of the wine. Most wine has a low level of suspended particles that will scatter the light slightly, particularly if the wine is bottled without fining or filtration. If the amount of scattering is small, you will still be able to accurately describe the wine as ‘**clear**’. If the wine has an unusually high amount of suspended particles then it can be described as ‘**hazy**’.

A bright wine has a glossy, reflective surface, like a mirror. Some wines are brighter than others: generally wines that are younger or lower in pH are brighter than older higher pH wines. Nearly all wines can be accurately described as ‘**bright**’. The opposite of bright is ‘**dull**’.

Excessive haziness or dullness can indicate that the wine may be faulty, for example as a result of microbiological activity. The precise nature of the fault can normally only be determined by assessing both the nose and palate.

However, some wines are deliberately hazy or dull.

This is an area of controversy and for this reason the WSET has elected to always show wines that are clear and bright and not assess this line of the SAT in Diploma examinations.

## INTENSITY

The level of intensity can be assessed by holding the glass at a 45° angle and seeing how far the colour extends from the core (deepest part of the bowl) to the rim (shallowest depth of wine). For red wines, it can also be assessed by looking down through an upright glass. In this instance, look at the wine at the point where the stem of the glass is attached to the bowl, to see how easily the stem can be seen.

All white wines appear colourless right at the rim when the glass is held at a 45° angle. A white wine that has a broad watery rim should be described as pale, whereas if the pigment reaches almost to the rim it should be described as deep. For red wines tilt the glass and look at the rim, if the wine is lightly coloured even at the core it can be described as ‘**pale**’. In this instance when looking through an upright glass it should be easy to see the stem of the glass clearly through such a wine. If the wine is intensely pigmented right up to the rim, it should be described as ‘**deep**’, and when looking down through the wine in an upright glass, it should be impossible to see the stem.

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**4**

**1**

**Two marks are available for describing the appearance of a wine.**

**SAT Wine: Appearance**

**Clarity/brightness**

clear

–

hazy/bright

–

dull (faulty)

 **marks**

**0**

**Intensity**

pale

–

medium

–

deep

**1**

 **mark**

**Colour**

*white*

*rosé*

*red*

lemon

-

green

–

lemon

–

gold

–

amber

–

brown

pink

–

salmon

–

orange

–

onion skin

purple

–

ruby

–

garnet

–

tawny

–

brown

 **mark**

**1**

**Other observations**

*e.g.*

legs/tears, deposit, petillance, bubbles

**0**

 **marks**

Sparkling, sweet and fortified wines should be assessed using the same scale used for white, rosé or red wines (as appropriate). So, an *Amontillado* Sherry could still be described as ‘deep’, even though an older *Oloroso*, a PX or a Rutherglen Muscat could be even deeper.

## COLOUR

Colour is the balance of levels of red, blue, yellow, green or brown found in a wine, and is independent of the level of intensity.

The composition of a wine at the surface or the rim is the same as the composition at the bottom of the glass, so the colour does not change when looking through different parts of the wine in a tilted glass. However, because the depth of liquid changes, the intensity of colour changes. White and most rosé wines are very pale, almost colourless at the rim, so the colour is best judged where there is sufficient depth of liquid for the colour to be easy to assess: the core. By contrast, many red wines are so deeply pigmented that they can appear opaque at the core, so the colour of red wines is most accurately assessed near the rim.

Many components contribute to wine colour, but as a very good approximation white wine hues can be placed on a scale that runs from ‘lemon-green’ (due to chlorophyll) through ‘lemon’ to ‘gold’, ‘amber’ and ‘brown’ (due to the effects of oak extraction, age or oxidation). The most common colour for white wines is ‘**lemon**’. If there is a noticeable greenness to the colour, the wine is ‘**lemon-green**’. If there is a hint of orange or brown, the wine is ‘**gold**’. Wines with a very noticeable level of browning could be described as ‘**amber**’ or ‘**brown**’, but these will generally be wines that are very old, or wines that are deliberately oxidised.

Red wines can be placed on a scale that runs from

‘purple’ to ‘ruby’ (due to grape skin pigments) to ‘garnet’, ‘tawny’ and ‘brown’ (due to the effects of oxidation or age). The most common colour for red wine is ‘**ruby**’. Wines with a noticeable blue or purple colour are described as ‘**purple**’. If there is a noticeable orange or brown colour but the wine is still more red than brown, it is described as ‘**garnet**’. If the wine is more brown than red, it may be described as ‘**tawny**’. ‘**Brown**’ should be used for wines where no redness in the colour remains. ‘Tawny’ and ‘brown’ are usually seen only in very old wines, or wines that are deliberately oxidised.

A similar scale exists for rosé wines, which can be considered as pale red wines, but by convention have their own set of colour descriptions. Most rosés are described as ‘**salmon**’, which lies between ‘**pink**’ (a purplish-pink or the rosé equivalent or purple) or

‘**orange**’ (an orangey-pink or the rosé equivalent of ‘garnet’). ‘**Onion skin**’ is a distinctly brownish pink.

Note that although certain colours are more often found at certain levels of intensity (‘brown’, in a white wine, is usually ‘deep’, whereas ‘lemon-green’ is rarely ‘deep’), it is possible to encounter all permutations of colour and intensity. Thus, ‘deep ruby’ differs from ‘medium garnet’ both in the intensity of colour, and where it lies on the ‘purple’ to ‘brown’ spectrum.

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER** When assessing the ‘Appearance’ be quick and move on. There are far more marks available elsewhere and you should spend your time concentrating on these. **Intensity and Colour** There is one mark for ‘Intensity’ and one for ‘Colour’. Two words, so long as they are accurate, will get you full marks for this section, for example, ‘medium lemon’. Remember these are hyphenated lines, therefore in order to get the marks you must use the terms listed in the SAT.   | **Clarity/Brightness and Other Observations** There are no marks available for these lines. Therefore there is absolutely no need to comment on these. We have elected to only serve clear and bright wines in examinations and, because other observations rarely reveal anything definitive about a wine, we have decided to use a mark that could be awarded for this elsewhere. Nevertheless, these are relevant tasting skills and although they are not tested at Diploma these lines rightly remain in the SAT.  |

Outside of the examination room there are other observations that can be made about the appearance of a wine. These rarely tell you anything conclusive which

**SAT WINE: APPEARANCE**

is the principal reason why this is not assessed.

When served in a suitable glass, all wines show legs or tears (streams of liquid adhering to the side of the glass after the wine has been swirled). Wines that contain sugar or high alcohol levels are more viscous and have thicker, more persistent tears. Some red wines are so intensely coloured that the tears are visibly pigmented.

Some wines may have a deposit which can indicate that the wine is unfined and/or unfiltered.

Some still wines show a slight carbon dioxide petillance or bubbles. This can be evidence of a fault (such as refermentation or malolactic fermentation in the bottle). However, some light-bodied, unoaked white wines are handled very carefully, in order to retain some of the dissolved carbon dioxide produced during the fermentation to add desirable freshness and texture.

Bubbles are fundamentally important to sparkling wines. There are a number of factors, in particular the cleanliness of the wine glass, that can affect how the bubbles appear in a glass and therefore their appearance cannot reliably indicate anything about the quality of a wine.

## CONDITION

Assessing faults is a skill that is not assessed in the Diploma examinations. Nevertheless, it is important that you are aware of the common wine faults listed below and able to identify them.

## TCA (Tricholoroanisole)

This gives the wine aromas reminiscent of damp cardboard. At low levels the taint can be hard to identify, but fruit aromas in particular will be muted and the wine will appear less fresh. This kind of fault can be due to a tainted cork (in which case a replacement bottle is unlikely to be affected), or due to tainted winery equipment, such a barrels (in which case a whole batch may be faulty). Because the origin can lie in the winery, this problem is not limited to bottles closed with a cork.

## Reduction

This gives the wine a ‘stinky’ character, sometimes like rotten eggs, and sometimes more like boiled cabbage, boiled onions or blocked drains. Very low levels of reduction can be surprisingly pleasant, adding character and complexity, and are sometimes described as ‘minerality’. In some cases the stinky aromas will dissipate once the bottle is open.

## Oxidation

This is the opposite of reduction. The wine will be deeper coloured and more brown than it should be. It will have aromas of toffee, honey, caramel or coffee, and will lack freshness and fruitiness. This could be due to failure of the closure, excess dissolved oxygen or insufficient sulfur dioxide at bottling, or the wine being too old. Note that some wines are made in an oxidative style and in these cases it is not a fault.

## Volatile Acidity (VA)

All wines have some volatile acidity, and low levels some feel that this help make the wine seem more fragrant and complex. However, high levels of VA give the wine unappealing aromas often described as vinegar or nail polish remover.

## Brettanomyces (‘Brett’)

This is a yeast whose activity gives wine plastic or animal aromas reminiscent of sticking plasters, hot vinyl, smoked meat, leather, or sweaty horses. Some consumers enjoy these characters, and do not consider ‘Brett’ at low levels to be a fault.

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**2**

**Seven marks are available for describing the nose of a wine.**

**SAT Wine: Nose**

**Condition**

clean

–

unclean (faulty?)

**0**

 **marks**

**Intensity**

light

–

medium(

-

)

–

medium

–

medium(+)

–

pronounced

**1**

 **mark**

*e.g.*

fruits, flowers, spices, vegetables, oak aromas, other

 **marks**

**5**

**Aroma characteristics**

**Development**

youthful

–

developing

–

fully developed

–

tired/past its best

**1**

 **mark**

## Out of Condition

These wines are ones that are either too old or have been stored in bad conditions (too hot, too bright, too variable). They lose their vibrancy and freshness, and taste dull and stale. There may be elements of oxidation too.

## Sulfur Dioxide

This is present in all wines, but levels tend to be highest in sweet white wines. At very high levels it can give a wine an acrid smell of recently extinguished matches. At lower levels, it can mute fruit aromas in a wine. Insufficient sulfur dioxide can lead to oxidation.

## INTENSITY

As a general rule, if when you insert your nose into the glass the aromas are immediately apparent even without sniffing then they are ‘**pronounced**’. If, even after inserting your nose and sniffing repeatedly, you find the aromas to be faint and hard to detect, the intensity is ‘**light**’. Otherwise, it is medium (but may be on the upper or lower side of medium) as explained in the section *Using the Scales*.

## AROMA CHARACTERISTICS

Describing a wine’s aroma can be a challenging task. When you initially smell a wine it can be overwhelming, especially if the wine is very complex. The Lexicon has been designed to help with this part of writing a tasting note by offering a systematic approach to aroma identification and description.

There are three mains types of aroma: primary aromas, secondary aromas and tertiary aromas. The Lexicon is broken down into sections to reflect this. Each section is then further subdivided into individual clusters for example, ‘Citrus fruit’, ‘Black fruit’ and ‘Herbaceous’, which each include a number of descriptors, such as ‘grapefruit’, ‘lemon’, ‘lime’, etc. If you work through these individual aroma clusters systematically and ask yourself questions about the kind of aromas you are smelling you will be less likely to miss something important. Note that not every wine will have primary, secondary and tertiary aromas.

## Primary Aromas

These are the aromas that originate in compounds found in the grapes such as fruity, floral and herbaceous aromas. They are generally the aromas that distinguish one grape variety from another when the wine is young. Fermentation generates some fruity and floral aromas which are, strictly speaking, secondary aromas. These include the pear-like aromas found in some inexpensive cold-fermented whites or the banana, kirsch aromas generated by carbonic maceration in red wines. These aromas can be difficult to distinguish from ‘true’ primary aromas. For the purposes of the Diploma you will not be expected to distinguish whether an aroma is derived from fruit character or from the fermentation process.

Within the primary fruit aroma clusters, it can be useful first to think ‘what style of wine is this?’ Is it fairly neutral and simple, or is it intense and aromatic? Then ask some supplementary questions. If it is a simple wine, then a short list of fruit descriptors from a single cluster may be sufficient. If it is intense, is there one intense aroma or is it aromatically complex as well as intense? For an aromatic wine, is it mainly fruity/floral or does it also have more herbaceous or spicy aromas? If it is mainly fruity, what kind of fruit aromas are there? Are there red fruits or black fruits? Are there green fruits, citrus fruits, stone fruits or tropical fruits? Finally, what is the nature of the fruit? Is it fresh (suggesting early harvest or cool ripening conditions) or is it jammy or tropical (suggesting later harvesting or hotter ripening conditions)? This can be particularly helpful later on in the evaluative part of the examination when thinking about common links or regions of origin.

## Secondary Aromas

These aromas arise due to production processes that occur in the winery (other than ageing). The most obvious of these are aromas extracted from oak such as vanilla and toast. Secondary aromas also include creamy, buttery characteristics from malolactic fermentation or the yeasty and biscuity aromas that can develop in sparkling wines as a result of lees contact.

Asking questions of the wine based on these secondary aroma clusters is a helpful way of ensuring that you do not overlook anything. Do you smell oak aromas or ones that could be linked to yeast or MLF?

## Tertiary Aromas

These aromas have their origin in ageing processes. The ageing process could be oxidative (caused by the action of oxygen), for example due to a long period in oak. This will add tertiary coffee, toffee, caramel and chocolate aromas. Or, the ageing process could be a reductive one (protected from the action of oxygen), for example due to a long period in bottle. This will add tertiary aromas such as petrol, toast, honey and mushroom.

**SAT WINE: NOSE**

In both instances, the ageing process changes the primary aromas, especially the fruit aromas. They become less fresh and can take on a dried or cooked character. At this point, care must be taken because dried fruit and cooked fruit aromas can be present in youthful wines that have been made from dried grapes or from grapes grown in a hot climate.

## DEVELOPMENT

Generally if the wine is dominated by primary or secondary aromas, it can be described as ‘**youthful**’. It is common for the secondary aromas (such as oak or butter) to stand apart from the primary aromas of fruit at this stage, as they are not yet fully integrated. If most of the aromas in a wine are still primary and secondary but some tertiary aromas can be detected then it is ‘**developing**’. If the predominant aromas are tertiary aromas the wine can be described as ‘**fully developed**’, even if there are still some primary and secondary aromas present. At this stage, the secondary aromas will usually be fully integrated and may be hard to distinguish from the tertiary aromas. The period of time it takes a wine to reach this point varies a great deal. For some wines it can happen quite quickly but for others, such as Vintage Port it can take decades. Only a handful of wine will remain ‘fully developed’ for an extended period. Ultimately, all wines will start to deteriorate when the attractive aromas start to fade and unpleasant aromas will start to develop. At this point a wine becomes ‘**tired/past its best**'.

Because development is a measure of the relative importance of primary/secondary aromas or tertiary aromas it is possible that a wine is no longer ‘youthful’ when it is released for sale. For example, vintage Champagnes and *Cru Classé* Bordeaux will have undergone a period of ageing before release and will have some tertiary aromas. Therefore, when they go on sale they are ‘developing’. Some wines, such as age indicated Tawny Ports and all Sherries and Madeiras, undergo an extended period of ageing prior to release. Therefore when they are put on sale tertiary aromas predominate and these wines are ‘fully developed’.

Importantly, not all wines benefit from ageing. For such wines, the youthful aromas do not change in a positive way and attractive tertiary aromas never develop. Instead these wines move very rapidly, in some cases in a matter of months, from ‘youthful’ to ‘tired/past its best’. This is true of almost all rosés, most inexpensive whites and many inexpensive reds.

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER** **Intensity** To gain the one mark for intensity you simply need to use the scale for this line accurately.  **Aroma Characteristics** There are five marks available and there are two important marking principles: * The 5 marks will be allocated to specific aroma clusters. The aim is to make sure candidates who miss out a key feature of the aroma characteristics of a wine do not get full marks. Exactly how this will work is laid out in detail below.
* The total marks available for ‘Aroma characteristics’ will be capped from 5 to either 4 or 3 marks if you describe an aroma that is very obviously not there. It is important to emphasise that this will *only* be used in extreme cases. This too is explained below.

 Clusters have not been introduced to catch you out but to make sure that those who identify all of the key components of a wine’s aroma character are rewarded above those who miss something out. It is entirely possible to describe a wine accurately and completely in a number of different ways and therefore it is important that we recognise this and we will take a flexible approach to marking this section. Therefore, do not be tempted to second guess how many marks have been allocated to a particular aroma cluster. As you will see below this is not necessary. The flexible marking approach is there to allow you to feel confident that you can get full marks so long as you cover all the clusters. Describe the wine as it appears to you rather than how you think it might have appeared to us. It is not possible to give every conceivable example but we have included several examples which we hope clearly demonstrate the approach we intend to take.  **Wines with primary aromas only** – If the wine only has primary aromas, then all five marks will be allocated for this. If this is the case you should still decide whether the wine is very simple or whether the primary aromas are complex. If the wine is simple then you should state this in your note. It is a more accurate description of a wine if you recognise this and write ‘this wine has simple, neutral green fruit (pear, apple, gooseberry)’ rather than list a large number of descriptors that are in effect describing the same simple aroma. See *How the Marks will be Awarded for Aroma Characteristics* below. In a complex wine there may be more than one type of primary aroma cluster. We would only use two clusters if they are very obvious and distinct where a failure to mention it would result in an obviously incomplete description of a wine: for example, the tropical passion fruit aromas and herbaceous green  | aromas in some high quality Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. In this example the primary aromas would be divided into two clusters each with its own allocation of marks. It would be both highly subjective and rather arbitrary if we were to say only three marks can be awarded for fruit aromas and two for the herbaceous aromas. Therefore, the marking key will be arranged more flexibly. For example: * Fruit aromas up to a maximum of 3 marks;
* Herbaceous aromas up to a maximum of 3 marks.

 This means that the marks could be awarded in the following combinations: * 3 for fruit + 2 for herbaceous;  2 for fruit + 3 for herbaceous.

 This recognises the importance of both primary clusters but at the same time allows the marker to be flexible. Either of the combinations above would provide an accurate description of the wine.  **Wines with primary and secondary aromas** –In this case the marks will be divided between the primary and secondary fruit clusters. A similar approach will be taken when allocating the marks. A maximum number of marks will be allocated to each individual cluster in such a way that a number of combinations of descriptors will get full marks. For example, the marks for a Cabernet Sauvignon with black fruit and subtle oak aromas might be allocated as follows: * Fruit aromas up to a maximum of 4 marks;  Oak aromas up to a maximum of 2 marks.

 This means that the marks could be awarded in the following combinations: * 3 for fruit + 2 for oak;
* 4 for fruit + 1 for oak.

 In this instance the oak character is subtle and the marks are weighted in favour of black fruit descriptors. It would be unfair to cap the marks for black fruit at 3 marks. If the oak was more obvious then a maximum of 3 marks might be allocated for each cluster.  It is of course possible that an oaked Cabernet Sauvignon might have two primary aroma clusters, one for black fruit and one for herbaceousness. In this case the marking key will reflect this complexity with a similar degree of flexibility: * Fruit aromas up to a maximum of 3 marks;
* Herbaceous aromas up to a maximum of 2 marks;  Oak aromas up to a maximum of 2 marks;
* Total marks will be capped to 4 if all 3 clusters are not mentioned.
 |

**SAT WINE: NOSE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| With no other limiting factors applied, this then gives you and the marker a great degree of flexibility and the following combinations of marks could get you a total of five: * 3 for fruit + 1 for herbaceous + 1 for oak;
* 2 for fruit + 2 for herbaceous + 1 for oak;
* 2 for fruit + 1 for herbaceous + 2 for oak;  1 for fruit + 2 for herbaceous + 2 for oak.

 **Wines with primary, secondary and tertiary aromas** –Once again the same flexible approach will be taken. An example of a fully developed Rioja *Reserva* might be: * Primary aromas up to a maximum of 3 marks;
* Oak aromas up to a maximum of 2 marks;  Tertiary aromas up to a maximum of 2 marks;
* Total marks will be capped to 4 if all three clusters are not mentioned.

 This is an identical break down to the fruit/herbaceous/ oak example above and the mark combinations will be the same too.  **Capping** – As before, this would only be used in exceptional circumstances. If you describe a cluster or clusters that are *very obviously* not present a cap could be applied, for example if you identified vanilla and toasty oak in a simple/neutral unoaked wine.  **How to Record Aroma Characteristics** You should write in clusters. If there are black fruit aromas and oak aromas then write the descriptors for each cluster together. If you approach tasting thinking in terms of clusters this will be instinctive. You should also name the clusters too. It is an easy habit to get into if you think in terms of clusters and it is something that, with practice, you can develop to give extra insights to your description of a wine. For example if you identify black fruit you could write about the nature of the black fruit, is it ripe, dried or jammy?  | When it comes to secondary and tertiary aromas it can often be very difficult to be certain of the source of these aromas. Therefore, naming the aromas as secondary or tertiary is acceptable and very sensible. The obvious exception here is new oak aromas.  The ideal way of writing a tasting note for Cabernet Sauvignon with black fruit and oak aromas would be: ‘*black fruit (blackcurrant, black cherry, black plum) and oak aromas (vanilla, toast)*’  **How the Marks will be Awarded for Aroma** **Characteristics** Broadly speaking one accurate descriptor word will get one mark. However the following exceptions will apply: * If a wine is simple/neutral in character then you will be able to get 2 marks for saying so. This means you only then need to write 3 valid descriptor words to get the full 5 marks.
* If a maximum of 3 marks are available for a cluster then you will only be able to get 3 marks for descriptors that relate to that cluster no matter how many you write.
* If you write a detailed and accurate description of the nature of the cluster then this can get one of the marks allocated to that cluster. For example (extending the example above):

‘*ripe and jammy black fruit (blackcurrant, black cherry)*’ = 3 marks ‘*black fruit (blackcurrant, black cherry)*’ = 2 marks. ‘Ripe and jammy’ is detailed enough to get a mark but ‘black fruit’ on its own is too generic to get a mark.  **Development** To gain the one mark for development you simply need to use the scale for this line accurately.  |

## SWEETNESS

Sweetness is mainly the taste of sugar present in the wine, though alcohol and glycerol can add a perception of sweetness too. Each point on the basic three point scale for sweetness (dry – medium – sweet) is subdivided into two. Almost every wine has some residual sugar and this scale has been subdivided this way to reflect the very wide range of sweetness that can be found within sweet styles of wine.

A ‘**dry**’ wine wither has no residual sugar or has levels that are so low they cannot be detected by the tongue. If the wine has a tiny amount of detectable sugar, the wine is described as ‘**off-dry**’. Many Alsace Gewurztraminers, Brut Champagnes, and inexpensive reds and whites are ‘off-dry’.

‘**Medium-dry**’ to ‘**medium-sweet**’ covers wines with a distinct presence of sugar, but which are generally not sweet enough to partner most desserts. ‘Medium-dry’ covers wines that are closer to dry than sweet and includes wines such as Vouvray demi-secs. ‘Mediumsweet’ covers wines that are closer to sweet and includes many White Zinfandel and Vouvray *Moelleux*.

‘**Sweet**’ covers wines where the presence of sugar has become the prominent feature of the wine. This rather broad category covers most classic sweet wines such as Sauternes and Port. There are a few very sweet wines which can be are described as ‘**luscious**’. Here the level of sugar is such that the wines are notably more viscous and the wine leaves the mouth and lips with a sticky sweet sensation after swallowing/spitting. Examples include Rutherglen Muscats, PX Sherries and some *Trockenbeerenauslesen*.

**CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT GUIDE: PART 2 TASTING**

**10**

**3**

**There are a different number of marks allocated on the palate for still white/rosé**

**wines, still red wines, sparkling white/rosé wines, and sparkling reds.**

**This is covered in**

***Notes from the Examiner***

**on page 13.**

**SAT Wine: Palate**

**Sweetness**

dry

–

off

-

dry

–

medium

-

dry

–

medium

-

sweet

–

sweet

–

luscious

**Acidity**

low

–

medium (

-

)

–

medium

–

medium(+)

–

high

**Tannin**

*level*

low

–

medium (

-

)

–

medium

–

medium(+)

–

high

*nature*

*e.g.*

ripe/soft vs unripe/green/stalky, coarse vs fine

-

grained

**Alcohol**

low

–

medium (

-

)

–

medium

–

medium(+)

–

high

**Body**

light

–

medium (

-

)

–

medium

–

medium(+)

–

full

**Flavour intensity**

light

–

medium (

-

)

–

medium

–

medium(+)

–

pronounced

**Flavour characteristics**

*e.g.*

fruits, flowers, spices, vegetables, oak aromas, other

**Other observations**

*e.g.*

texture, balance, other

**sparkling wines (mousse):**

delicate

–

creamy

–

aggressive

**Finish**

short

–

medium (

-

)

–

medium

–

medium(+)

–

long

Labelling terms for sweetness are legally controlled in the EU and furthermore the defined scales for still and sparkling wines are different. You should not be led by these legal boundaries and should not write your answers referring to the level of residual sugar in g/L. For example a demi-sec Champagne, which must have a residual sugar level in the range 32–50 g/L, should be described as either ‘medium-sweet’ or ‘sweet’ depending on the level of sugar.

## ACIDITY

The main acids in wine are tartaric and malic (from the grape juice) or lactic (converted from malic acid in almost all reds and many whites). In some cases, acid is added in the winery. Unlike volatile acids, which were discussed earlier in *Condition*, these acids are odourless and can only be detected on the palate.

For most people acids are detected most strongly at the sides of the tongue, where they cause a sharp, tingling sensation, and cause your mouth to water, as it tries to restore its natural acid balance. The more your mouth waters, and the longer it waters, the higher the level of acid in the wine. Note that if you are dehydrated when tasting, your mouth will water less. Wines described as having ‘**low acidity**’ will feel broad, soft or even flabby. ‘**High acidity**’ tends to be found in wines made from grapes ripened in cool conditions, and causes these wines to be especially mouth-watering.

When considering the acidity in a wine there are a couple of things to remember. First, high levels of sweetness and acidity can appear to mask each other. In a sweet wine, the high acidity is not the single predominant feature, rather it balances with the high sugar levels. Therefore the acidity in a sweet wine will appear less obvious compared to the acid in a dry highacid wine such as a Chablis. However, whatever the level of sugar, the mouth-watering effect caused by the acidity remains and this is always a reliable guide when it comes to judging the level of acidity. Second, alcohol can create a burning sensation similar to acidity. Again, feel for the mouth-watering effect to see whether this is due to acid or alcohol for any particular wine.

## TANNIN

Tannin is extracted from grape skins (in red wines and a few rare whites), oak (in oaked red and white wines), and it can also be extracted from grape stems and seeds.

Tannins bind to proteins in your saliva, causing your mouth to dry up and feel rough; they contribute to the texture or feel of a wine in the mouth and they also have a bitter taste. The astringent, drying sensation can be felt most clearly on the gums above your front teeth, so ensure you coat this area with a little of the wine you are tasting.

Tannin levels can easily be misread because not all tannins have the same effect; unripe tannins tend to be more aggressively astringent, whereas ripe tannins contribute more to textural richness. It takes experience to be able to conclude that a basic quality Cabernet Sauvignon made from barely-ripe grapes has a medium level of tannins, despite them being very astringent and harsh, whereas a high quality Shiraz from a very hot region may have very high levels of velvet-textured ripe tannins despite showing very little astringency. If the tannins are very astringent, ask yourself if the body of the wine feels thin. If it does, this is a good indication of low tannin levels. On the other hand if the astringency is low, ask yourself if the wine is very full bodied and mouth-filing. If it is, this can be a good indication of high levels of tannin.

Descriptions of tannin nature tend to fall into one of two types. You could describe the ripeness of the tannin; under-ripe tannins are astringent and can taste bitter and ‘green’ whereas ripe tannins provide richness and body. Alternatively you could describe the grain or texture of the tannins. Ask yourself, how smooth do they feel? Are they rough (like coarse ground sandpaper) or are they smooth (like a fine silk)? Generally, ripe tannins are also fine textured and unripe tannins feel rougher.

## ALCOHOL

Alcohol is detected mainly through the sense of touch. Although alcohol is less dense than water, it is more viscous, and higher levels make a wine seem heavier in the mouth. Low levels of alcohol can make a wine seem a bit watery, although this can be compensated for by

**SAT WINE: PALATE**

other structural elements such as grape extract and residual sugar.

At high levels, alcohol triggers pain receptors, giving a hot, burning sensation, especially after spitting or swallowing. This burning sensation can be confused with the tingling sensation caused by acidity. If you are trying to distinguish the two, look at whether the wine is also mouth-watering (and therefore high in acid) or feels thick and viscous (and high in alcohol). It may be high in both.

Alcohol levels in wines are generally rising, but currently a wine with medium(+/-) alcohol would have a level of about 10.5–14% abv. Within this range, 10.5– 11.5% abv would be ‘**medium(-)**’ and 13.5–14% abv would be ‘**medium(+)**’. Anything below 10.5% abv would be considered ‘**low**’, and anything above 14% abv would be considered ‘**high**’.

For fortified wines where alcohol levels start at 15% abv, the medium level would be 16.5–18.5% abv.

## BODY

Body is the overall feel and texture created by a wine in your mouth, its mouthfeel. It is not a single component, but is an overall impression created by all the structural components working together. For most wines, alcohol is the main factor contributing to body. Sugar and grape extract add to body, whereas high acidity makes a wine feel lighter in body. Generally high levels of tannin make a wine feel fuller-bodied, but low levels of astringent tannin can make it seem harsher, thinner and therefore lighter in body.

For a wine that is high in alcohol, with ripe tannins, and intense flavours (= full-bodied), or a wine that is low in alcohol, high in acid and delicately flavoured (= lightbodied), assessing the level of body is straightforward. For wines that are sweet, but high in acid and low in alcohol (for example), it can be harder to agree on the level of body, and the decision will be based on which of these factors contributes the most to the texture of the wine.

## MOUSSE

Mousse is relevant only in the discussion of sparkling wines and is used to describe the feel of the bubbles. For most sparkling wines, expect the mousse to be ‘**creamy**’, in other words enough to provide a lively sparkle on the palate without seeming too frothy or aggressive. Some young sparkling wines are extremely lively, and seem to explode on the palate, then lose all their bubbles in one quick blast. These would be described as ‘**aggressive**’. Other sparkling wines (generally those that have undergone extensive ageing, or those that are bottled at a lower than typical pressure of dissolved carbon dioxide) have bubbles that are very soft and fine. These are described as ‘**delicate**’.

## FLAVOUR INTENSITY AND CHARACTERISTICS

Flavour intensity and flavour characteristics are detected through the sense of smell. Once the wine is in your mouth, your body heat raises the wine’s temperature and causes aromatic molecules to rise up the back of your nose to the receptor that handles your sense of smell. Your brain integrates these impressions with the taste and touch impressions provided by your mouth.

Generally, flavours on the palate and their intensity should be the same as aromas detected on the nose. However, the warming of the wine on your tongue can release larger quantities of some aromas, and bring them to your attention where you were unable to detect them on the nose. Savoury, earthy, spicy and oaky aromas tend to be more prominent on the palate. Some fruity and floral aromas are sometimes less prominent on the palate than you would expect, based on the nose.

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS

These should be used sparingly, but can help bring a tasting note to life. If, when you read your note covering flavour characteristics and levels of structural components, you find that it is offers a complete description of the wine, then there is no need to add anything extra. You may find that something is missing, and generally where this happens it is something connected with the texture of the wine, the way the components fit together, or some other aspect such as the overall impression of the aromas and flavours.

Some suggested terms are provided in the Lexicon. Most of these need to be combined with the level of the relevant structural component. They are generally helpful where the level of the structural component is remarkably high or low. Most of these words are difficult to define using other words, and their use is most easily explained using a few examples:

‘*…with a high level of zesty acidity*’– The acid is high, but the effect is a pleasant one. This is often true of a German Riesling *Kabinett*, a good quality Champagne, or a Hunter Valley Semillon. ‘*The wine is dry and austere…*’ – It is bone dry (well below 4 g/L) and probably has rather meagre fruit and high acidity too. Muscadet or Chablis can show this.

**‘***…and a high level of hot alcohol****’*** – The level is high, and not integrated into the wine. It is unbalanced to the degree that it causes an unpleasant burning sensation on the palate or in the finish. Some New World Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignons suffer from this.

If you do use some of these words, avoid the temptation to overload your tasting note with them (there is only a maximum of one mark available for a well-chosen word). Instead, decide what you think is the most notable structural component of the wine, and qualify this one component with one descriptive word.

## FINISH

The finish is the collection of sensations after you had swallowed the wine or spat the wine out. How long the sensations linger is an important indicator of quality, but when assessing the length of the finish you should only count the persistence of the desirable sensations – this is sometimes usefully described as aromatic persistence. A wine with a very long lingering bitterness could be described as having a bitter aftertaste, but if the fruit impressions disappear quickly, the finish should be described as short.

Although tasters can objectively agree which of two wines has a longer finish, perceptions of length vary from taster to taster so it does not make sense to promote a precise scale for length in seconds. Generally, for a basic quality wine, the pleasant flavours will often disappear within a few seconds, and the finish is ‘**short**’. For a very fine wine the flavours can last for a minute or more, and the finish is described as ‘**long**’.

**SAT WINE: PALATE**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   |  | **Still White/Rosé** **(including fortified)**  | **Still Red** **(including fortified)**  | **Sparkling White/****Rosé**  | **Sparkling Red**  |
| **Sweetness**  |  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  |
| **Acidity**  |  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  |
| **Tannin**  | *level*  | 0 marks  | 1 mark  | 0 marks  | 1 marks  |
|  | *nature*  | 0 marks  | 1 mark  | 0 marks  | 0 marks  |
| **Alcohol**  |  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  |
| **Body**  |  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  |
| **Flavour intensity**  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  |
| **Flavour characteristics**  | 3 marks in total  | 3 marks in total  | 3 marks in total  | 3 marks in total  |
| **Other observations** (max 1 mark)  |
| **Mousse**  | 0 marks  | 0 marks  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  |
| **Finish**  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  | 1 mark  |
| **Total**  | **9 marks**  | **11 marks**  | **10 marks**  | **11 marks**  |

There are a lot of marks available here. Sadly, all too high tannins of a Barolo being described as low). often candidates miss easy marks by forgetting to However, for ‘Sweetness’, a slightly stricter approach comment on a particular feature of a wine. We often will be taken. For example, if a dry wine is described as see evidence of memory aids written on exam scripts anything other than dry or off-dry then a cap would be that have been used to help the candidate remember all applied. the things they need to comment on. This is a very sensible approach to take and one we would **Sweetness** recommend for all candidates. You can gain the one mark for sweetness by using the  scale for this line correctly. Do not be tempted to use **Mark Allocations** other terminology for sweetness. In this section the total number of marks available varies. There are 9 marks that are common to all wine **Acidity** and extra marks are available for ‘Mousse’, ‘Tannin Red wines generally tend to have lower levels of acidity level’ and ‘Tannin nature’ depending on the type of than white wines, therefore the levels of acidity in a red wine being assessed. This is summarised in the table wine should be judged against other red wines. This above. means there is one acid scale for white and rosé wines, and a separate one for red wines. This system ensures that every component that needs to be assessed on the palate is treated equally For the purposes of the Diploma exam, judge and consistently. sparkling and fortified wines using the same scale as still  red, white or rosé wines (as appropriate). This means **Mark Capping** that many sparkling wines will have high acidity and If you make a significant error when assessing many fortified wines will have low acidity. ‘Sweetness’, ‘Acidity’, ‘Body’, ‘Alcohol’, ‘Tannin’ or ‘Flavour intensity’ then the total number of marks **Tannin** available on the palate may be reduced by 2 marks There are no marks available for tannin for white or rosé resulting in the following totals: wines. It is possible for these wines to have very low levels of tannin. For example, some white wines made * Still white – 7 marks with skin contact can have a waxy bitterness, some oaky
* Still red – 9 marks whites can be slightly astringent due to the high impact
* Sparkling white – 8 marks of the oak and some rosés can have been kept on the
* Sparkling red – 9 marks skins long enough for tannins to be detectable. In all of

 these situations, you can gain a mark under ‘Other This type of capping would *only* be applied if a feature observations’ for noting these subtle effects. that was at the end of a scale is described incorrectly as being at the opposite end of the scale (in this case the  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The descriptors provided on the ‘*nature*’ line under ‘Tannin’ in the SAT, or on the line ‘Tannin’ under ‘Other observations’ in the Wine-Lexicon are more than enough to be able to get full marks when describing the ‘*nature*’ of the ‘Tannin’. You may use other words, but be aware that the examiner has to be able to understand what you mean before they can award the mark.  **Alcohol, Body, Mousse and Flavour Intensity** The marks that are available for these three or, where relevant, four lines can be gained by using the scales correctly.  **Flavour Characteristics and Other Observations** The marks for these two lines are linked. There is a maximum of three marks available for ‘Flavour characteristics’ and one mark is available for ‘Other observations’. However there are only three marks in total available across these two lines. Therefore it is possible to get full marks in two ways: * 3 marks for ‘Flavour Characteristics’ and 0 marks for ‘Other observations’;
* 2 marks for ‘Flavour Characteristics’ and 1 mark for ‘Other observations’.

 Don’t forget that far more marks are available for ‘Aroma characteristics’ on the nose, so that is where you should provide your most extensive list of descriptors. On the palate you should aim for brevity  | but nonetheless offer as complete a description of the wine as possible. We will allocate the marks for ‘Flavour characteristics’ amongst the clusters. Therefore you must make sure you have something from each of the clusters you have identified on the nose or else you may not gain all the marks that are available. It would be rare for there to be more than three clusters which is why the marks have been limited to three. If there are more than three clusters then full marks can be gained by making an observation from any three of the clusters. Be aware that if you choose to make an ‘Other observation’ about one of the structural components of a wine (sweetness, acidity, alcohol) you must use it in conjunction with the appropriate word from for the scale. For example: ‘*High acidity*’ = 1 mark for using the scale for acidity correctly. ‘*High levels of zesty acidity’* = 1 mark for using the scale for acidity correctly and 1 mark for the complementary ‘zesty’. ‘*Zesty acidity*’ = 0 marks because you have not used the scale correctly. This is necessary so that we are able to assess whether you are have used the scale correctly.  **Finish** The mark that is available for this line can be gained by using the scales correctly.  |

There are many different scales used to assess quality. Numerical or point scales are common. Here we use a descriptive scale, ranging from ‘poor’ to ‘outstanding’. As long as wines are rated along a single dimension of quality, it is easy to convert points to descriptions and vice versa.

In some situations you may find it useful to judge wine quality against a price point. In order to do this, you must judge the absolute quality first, and then take the price into account. Such a judgement is an assessment of value for money, rather than a true quality assessment.

In other situations you will find it useful to judge a wine against other wines of the same type (‘is this a good example of a Napa Cabernet Sauvignon?’). This requires considerable skill, and experience with the category being judged. It also requires the judge to have an idea of what the type of wine should taste like. But even in classic regions, styles change. Should a wine judge mark a Bordeaux *Cru Classé* 2009 poorly because it does not taste like the Bordeaux wines of the 1980s, or should they judge by the standards of the time, or the standards of the particular Château? If assessment against the peer group is the only kind of quality assessment that ever takes place, it makes no sense to say one region produces higher quality wines than another. In order to make such comparisons, we need a set of quality criteria that can apply to all wines.

Therefore in your Diploma tasting exam, your quality judgements should be absolute – not taking price or origin into account.

**15**

**SAT WINE: CONCLUSIONS**

**4**

**The mark allocations for conclusions vary significantly depending on the**

**mark allocation on the palate, the Unit and the type of question being asked. This is explained in detail in the**

**section**

***Notes from the Examiner***

**on page 18.**

**SAT Wine: Conclusions**

**ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY**

**Quality level**

faulty

–

poor

–

acceptable

–

good

–

very good

–

outstanding

**Reasons for**

**assessment**

*e.g.*

structure, balance, concentration, complexity, length, typicity

**ASSESSMENT OF READINESS FOR DRINKING / POTENTIAL FOR AGEING**

**Level of readiness for**

**drinking / potential**

**for ageing**

too young

can drink now,

but has potential

for ageing

drink now: not

suitable for ageing

or further ageing

too old

–

–

–

**Reasons for**

**assessment**

*e.g.*

structure, balance, concentration, complexity, length, typicity

**THE WINE IN CONTEXT**

**Origins / variety /**

**theme**

*for example:*

location (country or region), grape variety or varieties, production

methods, climatic influences

**Price category**

inexpensive

–

mid

-

priced

–

high

-

priced

–

premium

–

super

-

premium

**Age in years**

answer with a number not a range or a vintage

## Reasons for Quality Level (Detailed Assessment of Quality)

Many criteria are commonly used when assessing the quality of a wine. There can be disagreement over how well a given wine satisfies a particular criterion (‘is this wine really balanced, despite its 15% alcohol?’), and over its relative importance, compared to other quality criteria (‘the 15% alcohol is too high, but that doesn’t really matter too much because the most important thing is that it is very concentrated and full of character’). This means there is room for experts to disagree about the level of quality of any particular wine. However, in many cases there is close agreement about both the quality level of a wine and the reasons for its quality level. This is possible because there are a number of criteria that are widely used when it comes to assessing quality.

**Balance** – Balance in wines can be thought of as a set of scales, with fruit and sugar on one side, and acid and tannins on the other. An increase in fruit or sugar can be brought into balance by an increase in acid or tannin. With too little fruit or sugar, the wine will seem angular, austere or thin. With too little acid or tannin, it will seem unstructured and clumsy. When assessing balance, you should also consider how well integrated each of the separate components is. Even if the fruit is balanced by acid, the acid can seem harsh or aggressive, for example. Alcohol should be well integrated, whatever its level, and so should aromatic components such as those derived from oak.

**Concentration and finish** – Concentration of flavours and structural components is frequently cited as a quality criterion. A wine that has weak, dilute flavours is seldom high in quality, but above a certain level more concentration does not necessarily mean higher quality. If a wine is intensely flavoured, think about whether it is also balanced. When using this as a factor to determine the quality level of the wine, it is useful to focus on the intensity of flavours on the mid and back palate, and concentration generally accompanies aromatic persistence on the finish, so it can be useful to consider these two factors together.

**Complexity and expressiveness** – Complexity and expressiveness of flavours or aromas are desirable features in a wine. The complexity can come from the fruit character alone, or it may come from the combination of secondary and tertiary characteristics. But simplicity is not always a negative, and not all fine wines are complex: sometimes purity and clarity of expression are what makes a wine great, and adding in oak or tertiary complexities (for example) would detract from the quality.

A great wine can also express some of the character of its origin, either with purity or with complex detail. Some of this character may come from the grape varieties used and in outstanding wines the character can reflect the location where the grapes are grown too. Much of this detail will not be known to you in an examination and therefore when thinking about expressiveness it can be helpful to start by asking yourself whether the aromas are generic or welldefined. Whereas an acceptable Cabernet Sauvignon will only have generic simple black fruit aromas, a better quality wine will have well-defined blackcurrant aromas.

Bearing these criteria in mind you need to judge the quality level of a wine. A ‘**good**’ wine is well balanced of fruit, sugar, acid and tannin, and all the components are integrated. It is free of faults, and shows some complexity and concentration and expressiveness from grape variety or region of origin.

If a wine is a little out of balance, dilute in flavour or has a generic character that fails to express any particular grape variety or region, but is otherwise drinkable, then it is ‘**acceptable**’. If the poor balance, any minor faults or any dominant flavours of components make it unpleasant, then it is ‘poor’. If any faults make the wine unsuitable to drink, then it is simply ‘**faulty**’.

On the other hand a ‘**very good**’ wine will show some elements of concentration, length, complexity or expressiveness that lift it out of being merely ‘good’. An ‘**outstanding**’ wine should be almost entirely free of criticism. It will be perfectly balanced concentrated and very expressive with high levels of complexity or purity depending on the style.

**Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing** The first thing to consider when assessing readiness for drinking is whether the wine is the kind of wine that benefits from ageing at all.

If it is mainly fruity, with a light acid or tannin structure, then it is almost certainly in the ‘**drink now: not suitable for ageing or further ageing**’ category. Such a wine may have a ‘shelf life’ of a year or more, but the fact it will last does not mean it should be considered suitable for deliberate ageing or cellaring, because generally the wine will not improve with age. If it seems like it should have been fruity, with a light tannin or acid structure, but has lost its freshness, or the flavours that have developed through the passage of time are unpleasant and at a level high enough to spoil the wine then it is simply ‘**too old**’.

If the wine has a very firm structure of acid or tannin, and has a high level of flavour concentration, then it may benefit from ageing. You need to consider what will happen to the wine with time, and this requires experience of seeing how wines develop in the bottle. Generally, the flavours develop away from fruit and towards more savoury, earthy and spicy characters and the tannins soften. The alcohol levels do not change, and acid and sugar levels change very little (though sweet wines very slowly taste drier as they age). With this in mind, you can make a tentative prediction of how the wine will develop over time, and how much the developments will improve the wine, compared to how it tastes now.

If you think that the wine is drinking pleasurably now but will improve positively in the next few years then you can place it in ‘**can drink now, but has potential for ageing**’. If you believe that the wine will be so much better in a few years’ time that it would be a waste to drink it now, then you should classify it as ‘**too young**’. This does not mean the wine is undrinkable, but rather that there is enormous scope for further improvement. If it has undergone an ageing process but is close to the end of its drinkable life (any further changes are unlikely to be positive), or if it is in decline (the changes that have occurred are beginning to subtract from the quality of the wine) then you should classify it as ‘**drink now: not suitable for ageing or further ageing**’. If you think the wine has declined so far that the negative changes have come to dominate the wine then it is simply ‘**too old**’.

## Identifying Origin and Grape Variety/ies

In order to identify a wine correctly, you need skill, knowledge and luck. When trying to construct your argument, it can be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

* Is the quality of the wine very good or outstanding, suggesting it probably comes from a classic European or premium New World region, or is the quality just acceptable or good, suggesting it may come from a less prestigious region? If the wine is of very high quality, this also limits the possibilities of the grape varieties from which it is made.
* Does the wine seem to come from a hot region (riper primary aromas, fuller body, higher alcohol, lower acid, riper tannins), or a cool region (fresher fruit, lighter body, higher acid, and perhaps more astringent tannins)?
* Does the wine seem European or New World in style? For some varieties, such as Chardonnay, the differences can be small. For others, such as Pinot Noir, the New World wines generally have more fruit, the fruit is purer and more clearly defined, and the structural elements (acid and tannin) are less prominent, whereas European examples tend to be more savoury in character, with more prominent acid and tannins. Of course, this picture is confused by many New World producers successfully making savoury, structured wines, and some old-world producers making some lightly-structured, very fruity wines.
* Is there any prominent varietal character? For white wines, it can be helpful to group varieties into those that are intensely aromatic (for example Muscat, Viognier, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc), and those that are more neutral (for example Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Garganega, Trebbiano). Within these, further clues can be found in the nature of the aromas (fruity/floral or herbaceous), level of sugar and acid, and the use of oak. It can be helpful to group black varieties into thick skinned grapes that give deeply coloured wines (for example Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Malbec, Carmenère) and thinner-skinned varieties that generally give paler coloured wines (such as Pinot Noir, Nebbiolo,

**SAT WINE: CONCLUSIONS**

Sangiovese, Grenache). Within these, further clues can be found in the aromas (fruity, herbaceous, spicy or savoury), the levels of tannin, alcohol and acid, and the texture of the tannins.

## Price Category

Simply state which one of the price categories the wine lies in. It is up to the candidate’s Approved Program Provider to set these, and use the categories consistently in your course. The categories will be the same as those used for the WSET® *Level 3 Award in Wines and Spirits*, but with one extra category (to make possible a subdivision within very fine wines). As a rough guide, the following are the price categories currently used at the London Wine and Spirit School.

* **Inexpensive**: up to £5.99
* **Mid-priced**: £6.00–£11.99
* **High-priced**: £12.00–£19.99
* **Premium**: £20.00–£49.99  **Super-premium**: £50.00+

These prices are for shop retail including all taxes.

## Age in Years

This is effectively asking you to guess the vintage of the wine. Depending on whether the candidate’s exam is in January or June, and whether the wine is from the northern or southern hemisphere, the age of the wine will be a number of years, plus a fraction. You should guess to within the nearest year, and marking keys will often accept one of two answers.

Candidates should use evidence from two sources to make their decision. Firstly, the overall state of evolution of the wine (colour development, presence of tertiary aromas, and indications of any period of ageing

e.g. in oak). And secondly, based on the overall style and quality level of the wine, how long is it likely to take to reach that stage of evolution. A premium quality Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon might still be saturated purple and intensely fruity at ten years old, whereas a Barolo of similar quality level would be paler and browner in colour, and more savoury in character at five

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|   **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Unit 3** **(still)**  | **Unit 5** **(sparkling)**  | **Unit 6** **(fortified)**  |
| **Total number of marks**  | 99  | 75  | 75  |
| **Range of marks available on for appearance, nose and palate**  | 54–60  | 57–60  | 54–60  |
| **Range of marks available for conclusions**  | 39–45  | 15–18  | 15–21  |

The total number of marks that are allocated for any elements are atypical for the grape variety or conclusions for a flight of three wines will vary region. These arguments become much more important depending on the Unit and the amount of marks that when you have to answer a common link question and have been allocated for the palate. Furthermore, they are considered below. depending on the type of paper we may allocate the When you make an argument for the quality level of marks for conclusions evenly between all three wines or a wine, the level of detail required will depend on the there may be a marks allocated for a common link. number of marks allocated, but you will never be If there is more than one mark allocated you should penalised for providing arguments that are too detailed, give reasons for your choice and the more marks that as long as you have time to write them. As a rough are allocated to a section the greater the detail that is guide: required. In certain areas you will be expected to make For an ‘outstanding’ wine you should be able to  an argument to support your conclusion. Note that even provide four distinct positive reasons to convince the if you get the conclusion wrong (you misidentify the examiner why the wine is in that top category. region a flight of wines come from) you will be awarded marks for a logical presentation of your arguments.  If you have decided that the wine is ‘very good’, then try to find three positive things that make it more There are three areas where supporting arguments than just ‘good’, and always include at least one are needed and these will be considered in turn. negative reason why you have not placed the wine in the ‘outstanding’ category. **Assessment of Quality** You will always need to provide an argument to support  If it is just ‘good’, then provide two positive reasons your assessment of quality. Generally the marking key why it is more than just ‘acceptable’ and two will accept more than one quality category, and you can negative reasons to explain clearly why you think the gain full marks as long as you provide a convincing wine is not ‘very good’. argument to justify your choice. When you put an  If the wine is merely ‘acceptable’, then provide three argument together you should think in terms of the negative reasons for not assessing it as ‘good’, but criteria outlined above and you should always give one positive reason why it is better than ‘poor’. reasons for your opinions. Remember that on the nose  If it is ‘poor’ quality, then provide four separate and palate you are merely describing the wine. It may negative reasons why it is in such a low quality be obvious to you that a wine is, for example, complex, category. but you need to demonstrate to us how you have come  to this point of view and you must therefore always **Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing** refer to the evidence in the glass that supports your You will not always be required to make an argument argument. for this. Where one mark is allocated for this, the For example, when referring to balance in your candidate simply needs to decide which category to arguments, it is not enough to say whether a wine is allocate to the wine. This will always be an estimate, balanced or not, you should discuss how well balanced and in this instance the candidate can provide a sensible the wine is, how the overall balance is achieved and range, such as ‘up to 1 year’, ‘1–2 years’, ‘2–3 years’, ‘3– how well integrated each of the wine’s components are. 5 years’, ‘5–8 years’, ‘7–10 years’, or ‘more than 10 When discussing complexity of a wine, you should years’. Because this is an estimate of something that is mention not just whether a wine is complex or not, but itself unknown even to experts, it is unrealistic to  what provides the complexity. present this information as a single date. The marking When discussing expressiveness, you should do so keys use the categories listed here and markers use with caution (you are tasting the wine blind and may be their judgment and discretion when candidates use incorrect). However, where you feel confident to do so, ranges that fall outside of these parameters. you could mention: which elements of this wine are Where two or more marks are allocated, then the typical of its grape variety or region; how purely candidate should provide reasons for their decision, and expressed or how clearly defined they are; and whether  |

**SAT WINE: CONCLUSIONS**

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| --- | --- |
| make a judgement about how much longer the wine will remain in that category. When you are providing reasons for your answer, you should ideally indicate whether you believe the wine is improving or declining (or at peak).  **Identifying Common Links** When only one or two marks are allocated to identification you will only be expected to state the identity of the wine. This is typical in ‘mixed bag’ flights where the concluding marks are divided equally between the three wines. However, where tackling a common link question you will need to provide an argument to back up your conclusion. These are the kind of factors you can refer to. When structuring your answer, you may find it helpful to divide your answer into two parts:  One or two sentences identifying characteristics that the wines have in common, which are consistent with your choice of grape variety or region (though this may not always be possible: sometimes the diversity of styles is evidence for certain regions over others). These can include levels of structural components, evidence of production techniques  | (use of oak, oxidation, or late harvest for example), evidence of climate (hot, or cool, or somewhere in between), and even quality (wines of very high quality are produced in a limited number of regions and countries).  For each of the wines, where they differ, discussing how the things that make them unique within the flight are consistent with (or typical of) your choice of variety or region.  There is often an element of luck involved when trying to identify a common link, particularly when you are asked to identify a region of origin. For example, your skill in classifying the wine as an aromatic white from a premium-quality cool-climate old-world region (for example), can then be combined with your knowledge of which wines fit this description. However, there will usually be more than one possibility. This is why we allocate marks for both the identification and the supporting arguments. If you do not correctly identify the common link but have given valid reasons for your choice then you will get most of the marks that are available for the supporting arguments.  |

## EXAMPLE 1: DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY

Wine 1 is an entry-level Italian Pinot Grigio and Wine 2 is a high-quality Italian Pinot Grigio. Note the level of detail in the conclusion. All too often candidates’ quality assessments are lacking in detail.

**CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT GUIDE: PART 2 TASTING**

**20**

**5**

**Examples of Good Wine Tasting Notes**

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| --- |
| **Wine 1**  |
| **Appearance:** The wine is pale lemon.  |
| **Nose:** The wine has light intensity aromas of very simple, neutral green fruit (pear, apple, grapefruit). It is youthful.  |
| **Palate:** The wine is dry, with medium(-) acidity, medium(-) alcohol, watery light body and light intensity flavours of simple neutral fruit (pear, apple, grapefruit). The finish is short.  |
| **Detailed Assessment of Quality:** Acceptable quality. The wine is clean and correct, and there is a balance between the light acid structure and the rather neutral fruit. The lack of flavour and short finish indicate a wine of fairly basic quality. Also, the wine is very neutral and simple, and expresses little if any varietal character. It is no more than a technically correct example of a generic style of easy-to drink white, rather than anything expressive or fine.  |
| **Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing:** Drink now: not suitable for ageing. This wine lacks any kind of acid structure, and the fruit flavours are too weak for them to develop into anything interesting. The fruit will fade quickly over twelve months.  |

**EXAMPLE OF GOOD WINE TASTING NOTES**

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| **Wine 2**  |
| **Appearance:** The wine is medium lemon.  |
| **Nose:** The wine has medium intensity aromas of fresh stone fruits (peach, apricot), with some green fruit (pear) and banana and hints of sweet spice (ginger). It is youthful.  |
| **Palate:** The wine is dry, with medium acidity, medium(+) alcohol, medium body and medium(+) intensity flavours of fresh stone fruits (peach, apricot), apple and ginger. The finish is medium(+) and slightly waxy.  |
| **Detailed Assessment of Quality:** Very good quality. The wine shows very well-defined and complex fruit character, ranging from fresh notes of pear, through to some tropical and spicy notes. This indicates well-ripened, but not over-ripe grapes. Although there is no other source of complexity (it is unoaked and young), the wine has plenty of character. It is also very well-balanced between the fruit and the acid, with concentration on the palate. There is some waxiness, which makes the finish slightly bitter, but it is not unpleasant. The wine is not complex or concentrated enough to be considered outstanding, but it is a very good, expressive example.   |
| **Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing:** Drink now: not suitable for ageing. The wine has enough substance (from the fruit concentration and the acid and tannin structure) to last 2–3 years, but it is unlikely the flavours will develop into anything more interesting than the attractive fresh fruit that it currently displays.  |

## EXAMPLE 2: COMMON LINK, GRAPE VARIETY

Wine 1 is a one-year-old Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon, Wine 2 is a high-quality five-year-old Napa Cabernet Sauvignon and Wine 3 is a ten-year-old Haut-Médoc Cru Bourgeois.

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| **Wine 1**  |
| **Appearance:** The wine is deep purple.  |
| **Nose:** The wine has pronounced intensity of ripe and slightly jammy black fruit (blackcurrant, blackberry), distinct herbaceous notes (eucalyptus, green pepper) and a hint of oak (toast). The wine is youthful.  |
| **Palate:** The wine is dry, with medium acidity, a medium level of soft tannins. It has medium(+) body and medium(+) alcohol, with medium flavour intensity of ripe jammy black fruits (blackcurrant, blackberry), eucalyptus and spicy oak (vanilla). The finish is medium(-).   |
| **Detailed Assessment of Quality:** Good quality. The wine is clean and has a good balance between fruit and tannin, with oak not too dominant. It is also a very clear expression of Cabernet Sauvignon – with typical black fruit and herbal aromas, though the fruits are a little over-ripe and jammy/confected in nature. However, the wine is not very complex, and although the nose promises a lot of flavour, the palate is quite light and lacking the substance of a very good Cabernet Sauvignon. This makes it good, rather than very good.  |
| **Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing:** Drink now: not suitable for ageing. The wine has a lot of fruit intensity, and some tannins structure, which will help give it a shelf life of 2–3 years, but it will be in decline over this period as the fruit fades.  |

**EXAMPLES OF GOOD WINE TASTING NOTES**

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| **Wine 2**  |
| **Appearance:** The wine is deep ruby.   |
| **Nose:** The wine has pronounced intensity of ripe black fruit (black cherry, blackberry), pronounced highquality oak (toast, vanilla, cloves) and some tertiary characters beginning to appear (black olive, earth). The wine is developing.  |
| **Palate:** The wine is dry, with medium(+) acidity, a high level of soft, velvety tannins. It has full body and warming high alcohol, with pronounced flavour intensity of black cherry, earth and toast. The finish is long.   |
| **Detailed Assessment of Quality:** Outstanding. The wine is an exceptionally precise expression of Cabernet Sauvignon character, with ripe yet fresh black fruits, firm yet very fine tannins and refreshing acidity. The wine has massive concentration and the concentrated fruit is able to absorb the high level of oak. The balance of fruit and oak, and the high level of extract mean that even at this stage of its life, it is showing a lot of complexity reflecting high-quality fruit and oak all of which follow through onto the long finish. The big structure and concentration support the alcohol which is integrated despite being high. An outstanding example of a premium New World Cabernet Sauvignon.   |
| **Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing:** Can drink now, but has potential for ageing. The concentrated fruit and high tannins are in balance now, but the wine has a lot of extract, indicating it is capable of further evolution over at least 3–5 years before it reaches its peak.  |
| **Wine 3**  |
| **Appearance:** The wine is medium garnet.  |
| **Nose:** The wine has medium intensity aromas of black fruits (blackcurrant, black cherry), some herbaceousness (mint), a hint of oak (vanilla) and obvious tertiary aromas (earth, cedar, tobacco). The wine is fully developed.  |
| **Palate:** The wine is dry, with medium(+) acidity, a medium level of soft, fine tannins. It has medium body and alcohol, with medium flavour intensity of blackcurrant, earth, vanilla. The finish is medium(+).   |
| **Detailed Assessment of Quality:** Very good. Although not especially concentrated, the wine is very elegant, showing a freshness despite its age, and a liveliness from fresh acidity. There is enough flavour to balance this acid but overall it lacks the concentration to be outstanding. It is, however, a very classic, savoury and elegant style of Bordeaux, showing a great deal of complexity from bottle age.  |
| **Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing:** Can drink now: not suitable for further ageing. The wine is fully developed, and showing a lot of tertiary cedar/earth character. It is in slow decline, and although it will last 3–5 years before the fruit fades totally, there is nothing to gain from keeping it any longer.  |

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| **COMMON LINK: GRAPE VARIETY**  |
| **Grape Variety:** Cabernet Sauvignon  |
| **Reasons for this Choice:** The deep colour (wines 1 and 2) indicates a thick skinned grape variety. The high quality (wines 2 and 3) indicates a classic grape variety. Herbaceous characters (1 and 3) make a Bordeaux variety more likely than Syrah/Shiraz, as does the fresh acidity of 3. The pronounced and well-defined black fruit in 1 and 2 makes Cabernet Sauvignon more likely than Merlot.   |

## CLARITY

Most spirits are ‘clear’ and ‘bright’. A spirit that is ‘hazy’ and ‘dull’ may be faulty but it could indicate that the spirit has received minimal treatment prior to bottling. In order to achieve the clarity and brightness that consumers expect, most producers filter their spirits to remove those elements that can cause haziness when a spirit is either chilled or diluted with ice or water. Some producers feel that filtration has an impact on the flavour and body of a spirit and choose not to do it.

## COLOUR

All spirits, when they come off the still, are colourless. Any colour that a spirit has is added after distillation. There are three main sources of colour: oak, natural colourings (such as those extracted from herbs or fruits), and manufactured colourings. When assessing the colour of a spirit it is almost impossible to tell where the colour in a spirit came from. Many oak-aged spirits have their colour adjusted with caramel, and some plant or fruit extracts can be as vivid as artificial dyes.

When assessing the colour using SAT Spirits, all that needs to be done is to choose one of the colours that are listed that best describes the colour of the spirit. For convenience the colours have been arranged in two lines. The first line broadly reflects the changes that can happen to a spirit during maturation in oak, as the colour shifts from colourless through yellow to more orangey colours and, finally, brown. However, this is not a colour progression that applies equally to all oak-aged spirits as the type of oak, the age of the barrel, the method of cooperage and the environmental conditions of the warehouse all influence the way in which colour is taken up. The second line is a short list of colours that commonly occur in spirits that have acquired their colour from natural or manufactured colourings. Remember that the colour alone tells relatively little about the type or quality of the spirit you are assessing and you should not spend a lot of time assessing it.

**SAT SPIRITS: APPEARANCE**

**6**

**Two or three marks are available for describing the appearance of a spirit.**

**SAT Spirits: Appearance**

**Clarity/brightness**

clear

–

hazy / bright

–

dull (faulty)

 **marks**

**0**

**Intensity**

Water

-

white

–

pale

–

medium

–

deep

 **mark**

**1**

**Colour**

Colourless

–

lemon

–

gold

–

amber

–

mahogany

–

brown

pink

–

red

–

orange

–

yellow

–

green

–

blue

–

purple

–

brown

–

black

**1**

 **mark**

**Other observations**

*e.g.*

louching

**1**

 **mark\***

## INTENSITY

Intensity is a measure of how easy it is to see through a spirit or liqueur, and ranges from water-white to opaque. Unaged spirits have no colour and their intensity is ‘**water-white**’; this is quite common. Most other spirits will be either ‘**pale**’, ‘**medium**’ or ‘**deep**’.

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Due to their high alcohol content, all spirits should form tears (‘legs’) on the side of the glass, and so this is not in fact a particularly relevant or important feature to observe. However, spirits can change in appearance when water is added. With unfiltered, high-strength spirits, you may notice hazy spirals forming in the liquid in the glass. With anise-flavoured spirits, you should notice a more extreme effect called ‘louching’: the liquid becomes milky and opaque when water is added.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER** **The Order of Tasting** Tasting spirits is unlike tasting wine in that water is added. This is necessary to help open up the aromas and to prevent the alcohol overwhelming your senses. Consistency is very important. We take the following approach when assessing spirits and we strongly recommend that you do the same in the examination. * Pour the spirit
* Assess the appearance
* Add water
* Re-assess the appearance if necessary
* Assess the nose
* Assess the palate

 The same basic rule applies when assessing the appearance of a spirit as applies when assessing the appearance of a wine. Be quick and move on.  **Intensity and Colour** There is one mark for ‘Intensity’ and one for ‘Colour’. Two accurate observations will get you full marks, for example, ‘water-white and colourless’. Remember these are hyphenated lines, therefore in order to get the marks you must use the terms listed in the SAT.  | **\* Other Observations** In the case of aniseed spirits, the mark allocation for appearance will be three. We believe that whereas most possible comments under ‘Other observations’ offer no particular insight, louching gives a very clear indication concerning the identity of the type of spirit being assessed. Therefore, it is reasonable to award a mark for making this observation. Note that because the variation in the mark allocation for appearance could give a clue as to the identity of the spirit the mark allocation for this section will not appear on examination papers. You should always assess the appearance first, record your observations and then add water, noting louching should it occur. Therefore a note for a Pastis might read, ‘Medium green. Louches when water is added.’  |

The next step is to smell the spirit. Unlike wine, there is no need to swirl the spirit. The aroma components are volatile enough: if they are there, you will be able to smell them. In fact, swirling the spirit can cause so much alcohol to evaporate that it can anaesthetise your nose, making it impossible for you to smell properly. Take a quick, short sniff.

## Condition

In order to decide whether a spirit is ‘clean’ or ‘unclean’ you need to ask yourself, are there any off-notes? Some of these (feintiness, woodiness) can contribute to complexity when present at low levels, and the point at which they become detrimental to quality (and, after that, the point at which they become an unacceptable fault) is something that tasters can reasonably disagree about. The same is true of how much staleness is tolerable. Cork-taint (musty, damp-cardboard), if present, is always a fault.

Feinty aromas (plastic, cheese, sweat) can indicate that the distillation has not been well controlled, but these are unlikely to appear in commercially produced spirits. If wood aromas dominate over the aromas derived from the base material, this is arguably a fault, and suggests that the spirit may have spent longer in cask than would have been ideal. It is possible for corktaint aromas to appear in spirits, either from the cork or from poor casks. However, the incidence of this is much rarer in spirits than in wines, because even when cork stoppers are used (much less common in spirits than for wine), the bottles are usually stored upright, which prevents the liquid extracting the chemicals that cause the taint.

The most commonly encountered fault is oxidation due to a bottle that has been open too long. Although the high alcohol content of spirits makes them more robust than wines, the spirit in an opened bottle will still be attacked by air over time. Also, the more volatile (floral and fruity) aromas will evaporate and disappear over a period of months. The combined effect of these processes is to make the spirit smell and taste less fresh and complex. While a long-opened bottle of spirit may still taste acceptable, and will not be any more harmful than a freshly opened bottle, the differences are obvious to anyone who has a chance to try the two side by side.

## Intensity

**SAT SPIRITS: NOSE**

**7**

**Seven marks are available for describing the nose of a spirit**

**.**

**SAT Spirits: Nose**

**Condition**

clean

–

unclean (faulty?)

 **marks**

**0**

**Intensity**

neutral

–

light

–

medium

–

pronounced

**1**

 **mark**

**Aroma characteristics**

*e.g.*

fruits, flowers, vegetables, grains, botanicals, herbs, oak,

sweetness, other

 **marks**

**5**

**Maturation**

unaged

–

short

-

aged

–

matured

–

very aged

**1**

 **mark**

Assuming the spirit is clean, you then need to consider how intense the aromas are. Nearly all spirits will be either ‘**light**’, ‘**medium**’or ‘**pronounced**’. The exception to this is vodka where it is the intention of the distiller to produce a spirit that has a very low level of congeners. In this case the spirit should be described as ‘**neutral**’. Note that this does not mean that the spirit has no aroma at all. With practice it is quite possible to tell vodkas apart.

## Aroma Characteristics

Describing aromas is a very subjective activity. It will depend greatly on your previous experiences. Some descriptions may sound fanciful at first. However, there are well-understood reasons why aromas such as honey, vanilla, hay or lemon are used to describe what appears in some spirits. Other aromas are less well understood, but tasters can be quite consistent in their use. What are the alternatives? Some writers avoid using aroma descriptors, but in order to evoke the spirit their tasting notes often use words such as, ‘elegant’ or ‘clumsy’. These words can be very appropriate, but difficult to define. A more scientifically objective approach would involve naming the particular chemical compounds that are present, which is almost impossible to do accurately and would be useless to most spirits drinkers.

In the Lexicon you will find a table of suggested aroma/flavour words, and how they might be grouped together. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a very thorough starting point. We recommend that you taste the fruits, vegetables and spices, and smell the flowers, the leather, the bread (particularly the different types of grain), and so on. Make your aroma-description vocabulary as wide and precise as possible. Always be aware, however, that one purpose of a tasting note is to help describe a spirit to someone who has not tasted it. Terms such as ‘the back of my garage’ or ‘the glue we used to use at school’, while useful for a private tasting notebook, are unlikely to help evoke the spirit to many other people.

Before describing the aromas you should have added a splash of water. The water should be non-chlorinated, such as mineral water, and should be added at room temperature. Adding water helps release volatile aroma components, but (unlike swirling) avoids the release of anaesthetising alcohol. How much you add is up to you, but we suggest up to half the volume of the spirit. The important thing is to be consistent, so that you can make fair comparisons between different spirits on both the nose and the palate. Adding water enables the maximum amount of information to be extracted when assessing the spirit, and also slows down the onset of palate fatigue. In most cases (including vodka and Cognac), added water will not improve the spirit’s aroma, though in some cases (whisky), adding a splash of water to the neat spirit can be one of the most rewarding ways of enjoying it.

## Maturation

If the spirit is ‘**unaged**’, it may seem a little harsh and spirity on the nose (depending on how it has been distilled), and will have no evidence of the aromas derived from oak such as vanilla, cream and toast. Some spirits that appear to be ‘unaged’ (in that they are colourless) have in fact been rested in wood for a short period and had any colour removed by filtration. The signs of these can be very subtle indeed. Conversely, some inexpensive spirits have a deep colour, much of which has come from added caramel. The absence of integrated oak aromas on the nose can indicate that the spirit has not gained much of its colour from maturation. It is likely to be a blend made with a significant percentage of ‘unaged’ or ‘short-aged’ spirits. This is true of some dark rums.

For spirits that have undergone an ageing process their development can variously be described as ‘shortaged’, ‘matured’ and ‘very aged’. ‘**Short-aged**’spirits will have only been aged long enough to acquire oak aromas without leading to much development of flavour due to the passing of time. ‘**Matured**’ spirits are ones where the oak aromas are integrated into the aroma profile, and some savoury aromas derived from ageing are also present. ‘**Very aged**’ spirits that have undergone a particularly long ageing process can be described as very aged. They will have developed aromas reminiscent of mushrooms, decaying leaves, wood polish and concentrated dried fruits, or fruitcake. These aromas are sometimes described as ‘rancio’.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER** We do not expect you to have developed your spirits tasting skills to the same level as your wine tasting skills. This is reflected in the fact that you do not need to use clusters in your Unit 4 examination.  **Intensity** To gain the one mark for intensity you simply need to use the scale for this line accurately.  **Aroma Characteristics** A mark will be awarded for all valid observation up to a total of five. For neutral/simple spirits two to three marks can be gained for noting the simplicity of the aromas.  | **Maturation** To gain the one mark for development you simply need to use the scale for this line accurately. Note that some spirits are aged and then filtered to be water-white and colourless. It can be very difficult to pick up any notes of development in these spirits and therefore, given that we do not expect your spirits tasting skills to be as advanced as your wine tasting skills, the marking key would have a range that would include ‘unaged’.  |

Importantly, how short is ‘short’ and how long is ‘long’ depends greatly on the ageing conditions – especially temperature and temperature variation. For example, in hot, widely fluctuating conditions (such as in Kentucky), very aged aromas can start to appear after four to five years, whereas a whisky aged in Scotland for a similar period could well only be at the ‘short-aged’ stage.

## SWEETNESS

By and large, this is an indicator of how much sugar a spirit contains. However, some flavourings, in particular liquorice, also taste sweet. Spirits contain no sugar when they are first distilled. All sugars are either added or are created from the breakdown of wood during cask ageing. Most spirits are therefore ‘**dry**’, but a few can be described as ‘**off-dry**’ – for example, some rums and Bourbons. Producers are permitted to add levels of sugar to some spirits. In most cases this cannot be tasted and is done to ‘soften’ the spirit on the palate. However, for some spirits, such as Pastis, the levels can be very high. Such spirits can be described as ‘**sweet**’.

## ALCOHOL

In spirits alcohol can often be detected as a painful, burning sensation – especially when a spirit is tasted neat or at a high strength. Ethanol also gives a sensation of weight or oiliness, contributing to the body. Young spirits and those distilled in ways that retain a lot of congeners can be quite ‘**harsh**’: the alcohol can burn even when the spirit is reduced with water, although in certain situations it is not just the ethanol that can cause this harshness. This is not necessarily a problem, because the spirit might be deliberately made to retain its ‘bite’ even when mixed. In most spirits, the alcohol effect is best described as ‘**warming**’ – providing a glow, and stimulating the pain receptors a little, but not in a way that is unpleasant to most people. In some spirits there are particularly low levels of impurities from distillation, or the impurities that would lead to harshness have mostly been removed through a period of ageing. These can be described as ‘**smooth**’. Very aged spirits and very pure, clean spirits can have very ‘**soft**’, well-integrated alcohol that makes them suitable for sipping neat. Such softness means the alcohol barely betrays their presence when they are used in cocktails.

## BODY

This is also sometimes described as ‘mouth-feel’. It is the sensation of richness, weight or viscosity and is a combination of the effects of alcohol, sugars and flavour compounds (and, occasionally, wood tannins). The body can be described as either ‘**light**’, ‘**medium**’ or ‘**full**’.

**SAT SPIRITS: PALATE**

**8**

**Nine marks are available for describing the palate**

**.**

**SAT Spirits: Palate**

**Sweetness**

dry

–

off

-

dry

–

sweet

 **mark**

**1**

**Alcohol**

soft

–

smooth

–

warming

–

harsh

 **mark**

**1**

**Body**

light

–

medium

–

full

 **mark**

**1**

**Flavour intensity**

neutral

–

light

–

medium

–

pronounced

**1**

 **mark**

**Flavour characteristics**

*e.g.*

fruits, flowers, vegetables, grains, botanicals, herbs, oak,

sweetness, other

 **marks**

**3**

**in total**

**Other observations**

(

)

max 1 mark

*e.g.*

tannin, texture , balance, other

**Finish**

*length*

short

–

medium

–

long

**1**

 **mark**

*nature*

simple

–

some complexity

–

very complex

**1**

 **mark**

## FLAVOUR INTENSITY AND CHARACTERISTICS

In contrast to sweetness, body and alcohol, which are detected in the mouth; flavour characteristics are detected when volatile components in the spirit evaporate off the tongue and rise up to the back of the nose. This is why we cannot taste properly when we have a cold or blocked nose. The groups of flavour descriptors are the same as those for aromas, however it is very possible that aromas that were not apparent on the nose will appear on the palate as some congeners become volatile due to the heat in your mouth. We recommend that you keep the spirit in your mouth for a few seconds to fully appreciate any differences that might emerge.

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS

These should be used sparingly, but can help bring a tasting note to life. If when you read your note covering aroma and flavour characteristics and levels of structural components, you find that it provides a complete description of the spirit in front of you, then there is no need to add anything extra. You may find that something is missing, and generally where this happens it is something connected with the texture of the spirit, or the way the components fit together, or some other aspect such as the overall impression of the aromas and flavours.

In keeping with the principles behind the changes that have been made to the SAT Spirits the WSET does not consider that is necessary to include suggested words in the Lexicon.

## Finish

The finish has two elements: how long the pleasant sensations last for (‘*length*’) and how complex they are (‘*nature*’). When assessing spirits it is important to record these two observations separately as flavours can develop and change significantly even after the spirit is swallowed or has been spat out.

**Length** – This refers to how long the pleasant sensations (rather than just the alcohol burn, cloying sweetness or oaky astringency) linger in the mouth after the spirit has been swallowed or spat out. Length can be an indicator of quality (see below). The length can be described as ‘**short**’, ‘**medium**’ or ‘**long**’.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER** In common with the nose, clustering will not apply on the palate either. Furthermore, no caps will ever be applied to the marks allocated for a spirit’s structural elements.  **Sweetness, Alcohol, Body and Flavour Intensity** The marks that are available for these four lines can be gained by using the scales correctly.  **Flavour Characteristics and Other Observations** The same rules apply here as for wine. There is a maximum of three marks available for these two lines  | and a maximum one mark for ‘Other observations’. This is explained in detail on page 14.  **Finish** Don’t forget that you need to make two observations here, one for length of the finish and one for the nature of the finish. Both marks can be gained by using the scale correctly.  |

**Nature** – This is used to refer to the flavour characteristics of the finish and, in particular, how complex they are. Some spirits are designed not to have a lingering aftertaste, and the remaining flavours are pure, clean and quite ‘**simple**’. The majority of spirits show ‘**some complexity**’: they show a few different flavours (typically some from the base material, and some from oak or aging processes). A few very highquality spirits are ‘**very complex**’: they show a succession of flavours, one after the other, and the finish is really where a great deal of the pleasure to be gained from that spirit lies.

## ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY

Making an assessment of quality becomes easier as you gain more experience. Assuming the spirit is not faulty (badly made, out-of-condition, or affected by cork taint), many criteria can differentiate between a poor spirit, an acceptable spirit and a great spirit. These include:

## Balance

One flavour (such as peat, juniper or anise) that dominates at the expense of everything else will make a spirit seem boring and one-dimensional. Harsh, aggressive alcohol or excessive sweetness, bitterness or astringency can also make a spirit taste unpleasant. However, unlike wine (which would normally be consumed unmixed), it is worth considering how the spirit is supposed to be used. Aggressive alcohol may indicate poor quality in a spirit that is supposed to be sipped neat (or with just a splash of water), but may give a cocktail component some useful ‘bite’.

## Length and Complexity

A balanced, pleasant finish where complex flavours linger for several seconds is often an indicator of a highquality spirit. Lesser spirits often have one or two simple flavours, and quickly become boring and disappear almost instantly, leaving no lingering impression. They may also be unattractive or unbalanced. The greatest spirits generally have many different flavours. These could come from high-quality base materials, or from complex flavours created during distillation or ageing, or they could be added through infusion or maceration of fruits, herbs and spices. However, some spirits, in particular vodka, are intended to have a short, simple finish. For these spirits it is better to consider their expressiveness.

Length displays itself whether a spirit is consumed neat, or used as part of a cocktail. This is one reason why it is important to use high-quality ingredients for cocktails.

## Expressiveness

**SAT SPIRITS: CONCLUSIONS**

**9**

**Six or seven marks are available for the conclusions depending on**

**whether an extra mark was allocated for Appearance.**

**SAT Spirits: Conclusions**

**ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY**

**Quality level**

faulty

–

poor

–

acceptable

–

good

–

very good

–

outstanding

**Reasons for assessment**

*e.g.*

balance, length, concentration, complexity, expressiveness

**THE SPIRIT IN CONTEXT**

**Origins**

*for example:*

Cognac, Islay

**Theme**

*for example:*

raw materials, method of production

**Style**

*for example:*

VSOP,

*Reposado*

**Price category**

inexpensive

–

standard

–

premium

–

super

-

premium

If it lacks typical flavours, or has been over-processed to the point of near-neutrality, a spirit becomes an undifferentiated commodity: it could come from anywhere and be made from anything. The best spirits are distinguished by the contents of the bottle, as well as the name on the label. They have something to say, either about their base materials, or how they have been fermented, distilled or aged. They express themselves through the flavours and textures you encounter in the glass. This could be the fine silkiness of a potato-based vodka, the pungent agave-derived flavours of a Tequila 100% agave, the finesse and floral complexity of a Grande Champagne Cognac, or the chlorophyll-green louche of an absinthe.

An objective assessment of quality goes beyond personal likes and dislikes. You might dislike a particular spirit because you do not like peat or juniper flavours, for example, or you might find it hard to enjoy lightly diluted, room-temperature spirits. Other consumers might like styles that you don’t enjoy, and a spirit might show its greatest appeal when mixed. The key question is, is it a good example of its type? If so, it should be basically balanced, free of faults, and have enough characteristics to make it recognisably a member of its category. If it lacks distinguishing characteristics, or is unbalanced, it could be described as merely ‘acceptable’ or even ‘poor’ (depending on the degree of lack of balance, and lack of expressiveness). Spirits that have a particularly fine balance, or some extra level of complexity or expressiveness (especially noticeable in the finish), can be described as ‘very good’. If they have all of these things to a high level, they can be assessed as ‘outstanding’.

But remember that different criteria can apply in different categories, and a vodka that is especially pure could also be described as ‘outstanding’ despite being simple, because for this category, purity and cleanness are prioritised over overt complexity and character.

## IDENTIFYING RAW MATERIALS

There is no substitute for practice when it comes to learning how to identify the raw material of a spirit. Given the costs of sampling spirits, we strongly recommend that you form a tasting group with other members of your class. This not only spreads the cost but gives your group a range of spirits that can be reused on several occasions in different combinations.

Note that unless you are given extra details that can be used to supplement your tasting observations, the examiners will normally only expect you to identify the class of raw material used. For example if the sample in question is a whisky you will only be expected to identify the raw materials as grains.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **NOTES FROM THE EXAMINER** In common with Units 5 and 6 there is a total of 75 marks available for the Unit 4 tasting paper. Therefore there are relatively few marks available for your conclusion when compared to Unit 3. Typically the marks are allocated evenly between the samples but in certain circumstances it is possible and reasonable to ask a common link question.  | The same principles apply here as apply with wine. If there is more than one mark allocated you should give reasons for your choice and the greater the number of marks the greater the level of detail you should write in your answer.  |

The best way to build up your confidence is to undertake a series of blind tastings. First you should try flights of spirits with the same ingredients. This will help you to determine the key aroma/flavour signatures that mark out grapes, grains, agave, sugar cane etc. It is important that, wherever possible, you should try unaged as well as aged examples. The advantage of doing these tastings blind is that you can avoid getting distracted by preconceptions of what the spirits are and you can really focus in on the flavours linked to the ingredients.

Then you should try and apply this knowledge by trying a flight of unaged spirits and another flight of matured spirits. Each flight should be made up of spirits that use different raw materials. It is vitally important that you do this blind so that it is a genuine test of the skills that you have been trying to identify.

## DISCUSSING PRODUCTION PROCESSES

This may at first sight appear to be a very challenging concluding section. However, when you break it down into its constituent parts it becomes far less intimidating.

First, you need to identify the spirit. Is it a grape brandy, whisky, gin, for example? This is something you will have prepared for as a matter of course. Once you have done this you then need to apply your knowledge of the production processes that are used for these spirits; information you will have gained as you revise for the theory part of the examination.

## EXAMPLE: A MIXED BAG

**EXAMPLES OF GOOD SPIRITS TASTING NOTES**

**10**

**Examples of Good Spirits Tasting Notes**

Spirit 1 is a vodka, Spirit 2 is a VSOP Cognac and Spirit 3 is a very-aged rum.

|  |
| --- |
| **Spirit 1**  |
| **Appearance:** The spirit water-white and colourless.   |
| **Nose:** The spirit has neutral intensity aromas that are very simple aromas of grain and citrus. It is unaged.  |
| **Palate:** The spirit is dry with smooth alcohol, light body and neutral simple flavours of grain and citrus. It has smooth texture and a short simple finish.  |
| **Assessment of Quality:** Good quality. The alcohol is well integrated and the overall texture is smooth with no harsh edges. Although the flavours are neutral, the spirit shows some of the character of the base material (grain) which mean that this is better than acceptable. However these flavours lack the definition of a better example which stops this from being very good or outstanding.   |

|  |
| --- |
| **Spirit 2**  |
| **Appearance:** The spirit is pale gold.  |
| **Nose:** The spirit has medium intensity aromas of flowers, dried fruits (raisin, sultana, citrus peel) and spicy oak (vanilla and toast). It is matured.  |
| **Palate:** The spirit is off-dry with smooth alcohol, medium body and medium flavour intensity with flavours of flowers, dried fruit and oak. It has smooth texture and a medium length with some complexity on the finish which has a sweet edge to it.  |
| **Assessment of Quality:** Very good quality. The flavours strike a fine balance between the delicate but complex flavours of the raw material (grapes) and oak maturation although they are lacking a little depth and concentration. The flavours are well integrated with the smooth alcohol and mouth feel of the spirit. Whilst the sweetness contributes to this it is slightly intrusive particularly at the finish. This combined with the slight lack of complexity prevents this from being outstanding.  |

**EXAMPLES OF GOOD SPIRITS TASTING NOTES**

|  |
| --- |
| **Spirit 3**  |
| **Appearance:** The spirit is deep amber.  |
| **Nose:** The spirit has pronounced intensity aromas of tropical fruits (ripe bananas, melon and mango), dried figs, oak (vanilla and cinnamon) and aged aromas (caramel, toffee and black treacle). It is very aged.  |
| **Palate:** The spirit is off-dry with smooth alcohol, full body and pronounced and complex flavours intensity of tropical fruit, oak and caramel, toffee with savouriness/rancio. It has silky smooth texture and very complex finish which reveals layers of flavours throughout its very long length.   |
| **Assessment of Quality:** Outstanding quality. The lifted fruity ester aromas combine with the savouriness of long maturation resulting in an incredible depth and complexity of flavour that is obvious from the first sip and builds across the palate to the finish. The balance struck between the sweetness and the almost bitter savoury quality ensure that the spirit is never cloying and combined with the smoothly integrated alcohol it gives a structure that seamlessly supports these flavours.  |